

and animating the game results to present the results received from the server in an entertaining manner. However, other embodiments of course might use a thin client architecture in which the animation is also conducted by the server and electronic gaming machines serve merely as a terminal to receive button or touchscreen input from the player and to display graphics received from the server.

[0010] Different features may be included in different versions of the invention. These and other advantages and features of the invention will be apparent from the following description of the preferred embodiments, considered along with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 is a game screen diagram showing a base game mode having multiple game presentations according to an example embodiment.

[0012] FIGS. 2A-2C are a sequence of bonus round screen diagrams according to an example embodiment.

[0013] FIG. 3 is a flowchart of a process for providing a base game according to an example embodiment.

[0014] FIG. 4 illustrates in block diagram form a software and data structure design for the electronic gaming machines and the group messaging mode messaging service which coordinates the group gaming mode and manages the game board during the group gaming mode according to some embodiments.

[0015] FIG. 5 is a flow diagram of a process for operating a group gaming mode messaging service plugin according to some embodiments.

[0016] FIG. 6 is a front perspective view of a gaming machine which may be used in a gaming system according to some embodiments.

[0017] FIG. 7 is a block diagram showing various electronic components of the gaming machine shown in FIG. 5 together with additional gaming system components.

[0018] FIG. 8 is a system block diagram of a gaming system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENTS

[0019] FIG. 1 is a game screen diagram illustrating a base game mode showing the primary display 104 ("primary display", "primary display area") and the top, secondary display 107 to illustrate an example slot machine display arrangement on which wagering game results are presented in a gaming area, typically found on the primary display. A secondary display area 58 is present on secondary display 107, or if a single tall display is used, the secondary display area is typically located toward the top of the display and the primary display area is located toward the bottom of the display.

[0020] The primary display area of a reel-type primary game (as opposed to bonus games or other feature games as described herein) in this version is a matrix 51 of symbol locations arranged in rows and columns to represent simulated slot machine reels that are spun to conduct a game round. Other embodiments may, of course, use other types of game displays to display randomizing of symbols according to the methods herein. The depicted columns of symbols labeled 52 represent the simulated reels, while symbols are shown in each symbol location designated 54. In this

instance there are five reels with three symbol locations 54 displayed at a time on each reel, but the game can be played with more and less reels. The simulated reel typically has far more symbols than those displayed, and as many unique stop positions as there are symbols on the simulated reel. The stop position may be counted, for example, by numbering the symbols on the simulated reel and using the number of the symbol at the bottom of the display window (the three symbols displayed in this example), or at the top or middle. Further, while multi-symbol reels are shown, other versions may use simulated uni-symbol reels, or a reel that has many symbols thereon but only a single window to the reel simulated, displaying a single symbol from the reel. Some variations of the present invention may use a simulated uni-symbol reel in each depicted symbol location 54. Winning patterns are typically formed by matching symbols along defined paylines that pass through the matrix 51.

[0021] Below matrix 51 is box 60, which displays the current wager and amount bet per payline. Other versions may not have a designated bet per line. To the right of box 60 is box 62, which displays the current credits in the player's account. In the bottom center a touchscreen play button 66 is presented in the lower central area of the display, which may show other game state related graphics. Right of this is win box 64, which displays the player's last awarded winnings. The wager credit denomination is shown in box 63. Along the bottom edge of the matrix 51 there is a message line, where the game station can display further instructions to the player.

[0022] FIGS. 2A-2C are a sequence of game screen diagrams illustrating a group gaming mode according to some embodiments. The sequence depicts operation in a second group gaming mode in which the secondary display areas of a set of gaming machines include a common, persistent game board with a plurality of prize objects 72. The matrix of symbol locations 51 in primary display area 104 continues to present primary game results in the group gaming mode, in cooperation with secondary display area 48. The operation of the group gaming mode is described below referring to FIGS. 2A-2C and FIG. 3.

[0023] While a set of prize objects with known depicted prize values is shown in this example, prize objects 72 may also include prize objects without a displayed prize value, such as a progressive prize or other special prizes labelled "Grand Prize", "Major Prize", or the like.

[0024] FIG. 3 is a flowchart showing a process for providing a wagering game according to one or more embodiments of the invention. Generally, the process is conducted under control of one or more electronic processors to present gaming results on one or more displays on a gaming machine such as those described herein. To initialize the game and make it available for wagering, the process starts a game engine software package for executing game code like that depicted in FIG. 4, including loading data structures such as media assets and code for a first gaming mode and a second group gaming mode. The process of providing a wagering game for a player starts at block 302 where a player logs in or deposits money or a credit voucher at a gaming machine. This typically includes receiving the player deposit through a credit input device such as the bill/voucher acceptor 112 (FIG. 6), and in response activating a credit meter value that establishes a player credit balance.